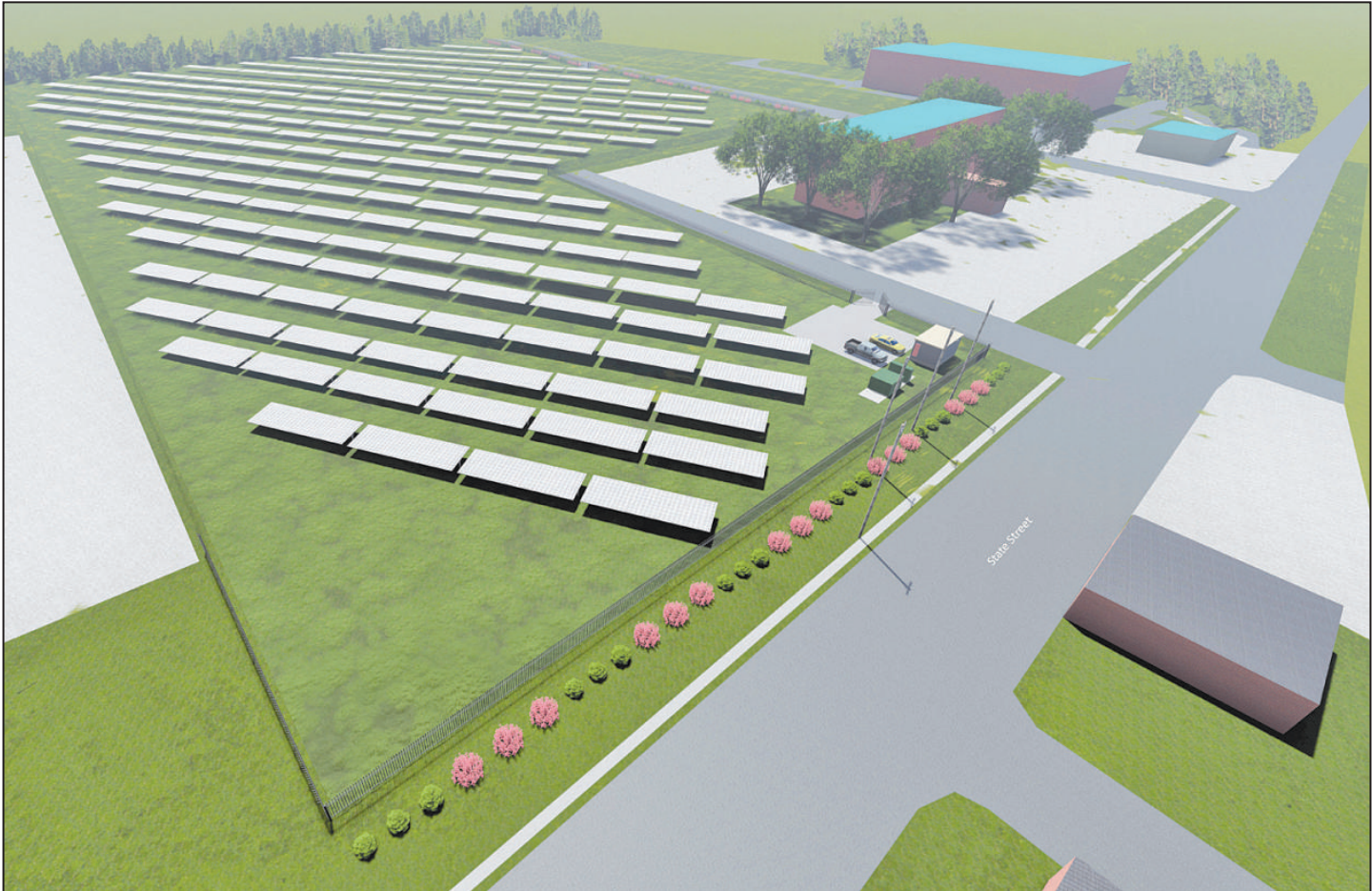




# Illinois Business Journal

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A rendering of the East St. Louis Solar Energy Center, which will have 6,000 solar panels and generate the power for almost 500 homes.

## Ameren turns light on new solar initiative

By DENNIS GRUBAUGH

A pilot project in East St. Louis will help guide Ameren Illinois in its pursuit of solar-generated power and, perhaps, influence the career path for generations of Metro East students.

Construction began March 15 on the \$10.2 million East St. Louis Solar Energy Center. When completed by year’s end, the 6,000 solar panels will generate the wattage to serve almost 500 homes.

Ameren Illinois officials gathered on March 1 with state and local leaders to formally break ground on the facility, which is going up on 17 acres the utility

owns next to East St. Louis Senior High School in the 4600 block of State Street.

Ameren Illinois Chairman and President Richard Mark called the project “historic.”

“No utility has ever built a solar facility like this before,” he said.

The project became possible because of enabling legislation passed last year. The Climate and Equitable Jobs Act (Public Act 102-0662) enables continued investments in modernizing Illinois’ energy grid, and it contains provisions to increase production of affordable renewable energy in Down-

state Illinois, including construction of additional large-scale solar facilities.

Blacked-owned or supported businesses are playing a role in the construction, which Mayor Robert Eastern III said is significant for the population of his community, which stands to gain from an emerging industry.

Contractors Mason Landscaping of East St. Louis, Terra 5 Construction, of St. Jacob, Guarantee Electrical Co., Granite City, and Azimuth Energy, of Fenton, Mo., will be using local labor to build the center.

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## Supply chain training program seeks participants in Metro East

By DENNIS GRUBAUGH

Efforts continue to boost supply chain management jobs in Southwestern Illinois with officials repeating their call for participation in a unique training program.

Since it was rolled out last year, the program done cooperatively between Madison and St. Clair counties and four higher education institutions has gotten good feedback but needs more takers.

Funded by a \$330,000 grant routed through the state Department of Com-



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merce and Economic Opportunity, the program trains “front line” staff of local companies that are hoping to build skills in inventory management, warehousing, transportation and management/leadership. Those skills are considered critical in supply chain management.

The supply chain involves almost anything in the production and distribution process and, as most every consumer knows, has suffered tremendous slowdowns during the pandemic. Even before that, officials in Metro East were recognizing that they had to build the managements ranks of their growing logistics industry, which now numbers more than 20,000 jobs in Madison County alone, with new warehouse facilities coming on line every year.

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## Drone school targeted in Metro East

By DENNIS GRUBAUGH

An effort seven years in the making is expected to culminate this month in announcement of a plan to establish a training school for drone users and entrepreneurs in Metro East.

While many of the major details are evolving, include the location of the school, the plan is otherwise, literally, taking off, said Carla Rose, the chief executive officer of Aerial Sync Education, a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit established to attract investment and potential students.

“I’m not finding anyone saying no,” she said of the idea.

Rose has been meeting with scores of businessmen, community officials and others in recent months. In March, she was invited to make a presentation to Leadership Council Southwestern Illinois, a key economic development organization in Metro East.

The school would aim to take advantage of a multi-billion-dollar industry. Drone technology is being applied to every conceivable field, from small business to the military. Training is seen as vital to an individual’s success in building a drone-related business.

In interviews with the Illinois Business Journal, Rose said she has had conversations with officials at America’s Central Port, and in Madison and Venice about obtaining access to land needed to set up modular facilities in which classes could be conducted and drones flown. No site has been ruled in or out. At least one of the sites includes 20 acres of space.

She envisions a yearlong curriculum in which participants could become federally certified as drone operators. It would be open both for companies that want to train their personnel and for individuals wanting to get into the field.

Rose, a Granite City native, has flown drones herself but said she is more interested in the educational component and in serving the underserved. She first became familiar with the topic while in the Executive MBA program at Washington University several years ago. The time since has been spent on research, much of it with the school’s grad students.

Aerial’s Sync’s plan is expected to be laid out in a meeting April 26 at Acorn Golf Course in Waterloo.

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